



CONSOLIDATION AND ADVANCE

ONE OF THE SUBTLETIES OF THE JEWISH CALENDAR IS THAT SOMETIMES THESE TWO SIDROT¹ ARE read separately, sometimes together. One is called Nitzavim, and the other is called Vayelech. There is a principle that the names of the Sidrot are significant. Although it is not certain that these names were employed by the ancient Sages, there is evidence that for the past thousand years we have been using them, round the world, hence they too have become part of Torah teaching, as in the adage ‘the custom of the Jewish people is Torah’². Hence the juxtaposition of these two names this year, when the two Sidrot are read together, has something to teach us.

Considering the meaning of the two words we are faced with an interesting con-tradiction. Nitzavim, meaning “standing firm”, derives from the first sentence in the first Sedra - “You are all *standing firm* here today.” The name of the second Sedra, Vayelech, derives from the the second Sedra which begins “And Moses went...”, signifying movement. Putting the two names together we get two opposite ideas joined together: Standing firm, and movement. This has a profound message for every human being.

There are two states in which an individual might finds himself or herself. On the one hand, standing firm, consolidating one’s position, and on the other, moving for-ward, seeking to advance.

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Judaism demands both of these approaches at various times. Standing firm in one's Jewish life implies the ability to with-stand external pressures, whether social or economic, which seek to force a compromise in one's Jewishness. The same is true regarding maintaining general ethical standards, based on the Seven Noachide Laws.

This is highly important, especially at times when in various ways one is facing challenge. However, this approach alone can lead to a state of simple conservatism or even stagnation. It could mean that the person will resist any urge to change, even changes for the better!

Hence, at the same time the name of the second Sedra urges us that we should move forward and remain open to all opportunities to advance and improve. Even if one is maintaining a high personal standard – there is always room for improvement.

It is providential that this double Sedra is read just before Rosh Hashanah, the New Year 5772 which begins this year on Wednesday evening, 28 September.

As a preparation for receiving the Divine blessings of the New Year, each of us is being asked both to consolidate and also to strengthen and advance our observance of Jewish teaching. To help us assess this, we can classify life as falling into three basic headings of Torah study, prayer, and good deeds, including charity.

On each dimension we can assess where we stand at the moment, and in which ways we can advance and increase, in realistic, practical terms. The resolution to study more Torah, to put more attention into prayer and to make additional steps of commitment to the practicalities of Judaism, especially charity, are suitable examples³.

The Sages tell us that any extra effort in these areas is itself a "vessel" for tangible blessings in the New Year. G-d wants to give us tremendous blessings: but we have to create the vessels in which to receive it!

1. Deuteronomy 29:9-30:20, and ch.31. 2. See ReMA in Shulhan Aruch Yoreh Deah 242:14. Concerning the significance of the name of the Sedra, see also the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot*, vol 5, pp.57-8. 3. See *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 29, 173-181.

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SEDRA SEDRA NITZAVIM - VAYELECH

GOING TO SELICHOT

It was after Shabbat of Nitzavim-Vayelech. Havdalah had been some hours ago. Chavale was painting a beautiful picture of a boat on a river. It looked so nice that she decided to get in it. She floated happily down the river, under the deep purple sky. Her grandmother swam past her. "Hello Chavale", she called. She was wearing a bright yellow dress and reading a cookbook. Some cows swam by, talking French.

Suddenly they were giving angry looks at Chavale, and they began getting closer to her, pushing at her boat. The boat was rocking back and forth. The cows were shouting something at her. She realized they were saying, "Get up!"

One of them sounded like her sister Dina. Opening her eyes, she saw it was Dina, shaking her. "Get up, Chavale"; she was saying. "Daddy says if you want to come to Selichot, you'd better come now."

Chavale looked at her alarm clock. It was twenty to one in the morning, and they had to be at the synagogue at one. She quickly got herself ready, and ran down to join the others waiting in the car.

"Its so funny going to the Synagogue in the middle of the night," Dina said, "This is so much fun!"

"Why do we go to Selichot, Daddy?" Chavale asked.

"I know why!" Benjy exclaimed. "It's because we're coming up to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, when we have to repent for all our sins that we might have done in the past year. So the Sunday before Rosh Hashanah we start saying Selichot every morning, asking Hashem to forgive us. Selichah means forgiveness."

"But it's the night now!" Dina whispered to Chavale, not wanting to interrupt. "Yes, but it's already the morning - it's one o' clock in the morning," her sister whispered back.

"And it's all a kind of preparation for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur," Benjy finished.

"I think I need to spend a lot of time thinking about what I did wrong this year and how I'm going to do better next year," Dina said sadly. "My teacher said I need to improve my behaviour in school. She's really not happy with me." She sighed. "I always seem to say the wrong thing to teachers."

"And I need to stop being so lazy," Chavale said. "I always put things off because I can't be bothered to do them".

"I have to stop teasing Dina," Benjy admitted.

As they drove into the Synagogue car park, their father said: "Well, it's a good start for all of you - the first step of repentance is admitting that you've done wrong. I'm sure Hashem will grant a wonderful year for all of you."

***CORRECTION TO LAST WEEK'S PRINTED ISSUE FOR
SEDRA KI TAVO:***

Avigail was wrong to think that the First Fruit offering (Bikkurim) could only be brought in the Spring or Summer. In fact they can be brought to the Temple at any time between Shavuot and Chanukah.

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